WHIRRAKEE

December 2010 Vol. 31 No. 11

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO

FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
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Office Bearers for 2009 - 2010

President	Jan Orr	5443 5668
Senior Vice President	Matthew Comer	0409 162627
Junior Vice President	*position vacant*	
Secretary	Anne Bridley	5442 6188
Minute Secretary	Joy Clusker/Rod Orr	
Treasurer	Ben Goonan	
Membership Officer	Anne Bridley	5442 6188
Excursion organiser	*position vacant*	
Syllabus organiser	Ben Goonan	
Librarian	Diana Collier (an assistant is still required)	5443 0137
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Whirrakee contact	Sabine Wilkens e-mail: s.wilkens@latrobe.edu.au	5443 2797

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with a 10 minute thing-of-the night natural history segment. The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 6:00pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Stuart Fraser, Glenise Moors, Joy Clusker, Bill Holsworth plus *two positions vacant*

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one sub-group (the Fauna Study Group) and is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

Fauna Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.

Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Bird Observing: Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley 5442 6188 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5442 6188.
To propose bird observing excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see page 2

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 31, No. 11, December 2010

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note
I always feel slightly melancholic when I see the Finger-flowers blooming, as this spells the end of the main flowering period and the freshness of spring. By the looks of this month's colour photos, they are already on the decline for this season, as are the Golden Pennants. However, many still look fantastic and I am glad we got a few photos of those late flowering species in this last Whirrakee *of the year. The next edition comes out in February, so you can spent January assembling summer photos and other contributions… Please take notice if you received 'the red dot on your wrapper' last month. It is explained on page 3. Lastly, I hope to see you all at the December meeting. Bring something edible to share and enjoy Rod's stories from the outback of Western Australia.*

Front page photographers: Rod Orr (left) and Matt Comer (right)
Both images are of *Caleana major*, the very special 'Common Duck Orchid'. The right photograph, taken at an unusual angle, reveals an orb-weaving spider sheltering inside the duck's 'belly'. Rod writes that it has been a good year for these strange little orchids. Despite their name, they are not very common in this district and in very dry years, hardly any of them appear. This year however, there are dozens of them in large patches.

Short Notices

Membership Renewal

If your *Whirrakee* has a red dot this month, it means we do not have a record of your payment of your subscription for the 2010/2011 financial year. If you wish to continue to receive *Whirrakee*, please pay by December 31. If you have already paid, please ignore this notice.

Next Garden Working Bee

will take place on
Saturday December 4 at 9 am

We are reverting back to the 'old' working bee time, because the weather is warming up
All welcome

Loddon Shire Nature Tourism Brochure

A handy brochure with a map of the Loddon Shire on one side showing the location of various parks & reserves & notes on the other side is now available from the Loddon Visitor Information Centre. Ph 5494 3489, email loddonvisitorinformation@loddon.vic.gov.au

News from the Nathalia Wildflower Group

By Lyn Loger

Recently Lyn contacted Anne Bridley in regards to Peter Marriot's presentation to the Club earlier this year. Why? Read on...

We are trying to put together a book on the moths and butterflies that use the local flora as host plants. We, Nathalia Wildflower Group Inc., have already done a book and a CD on the local flora and this seemed to be a natural extension. Two of us, Judy Ormond and I, have been collecting information for nearly two years and I have also been growing caterpillars and documenting the results.

We want to reach out to young people and so we are going to hold a 'Bardi Gras' next year, on Easter Saturday. We will be having little children involved in a ceremony to celebrate the great Bardi Grub Moth from up here, the Ghost or Rain Moth. We will have children wearing wings of moths and butterflies replicating a spectrum of the local species, plus also have a fantasy section. It should be great fun. We're well under way now. If your organisation in interested in our project and/or our ceremony, let us know. It's great to share information.

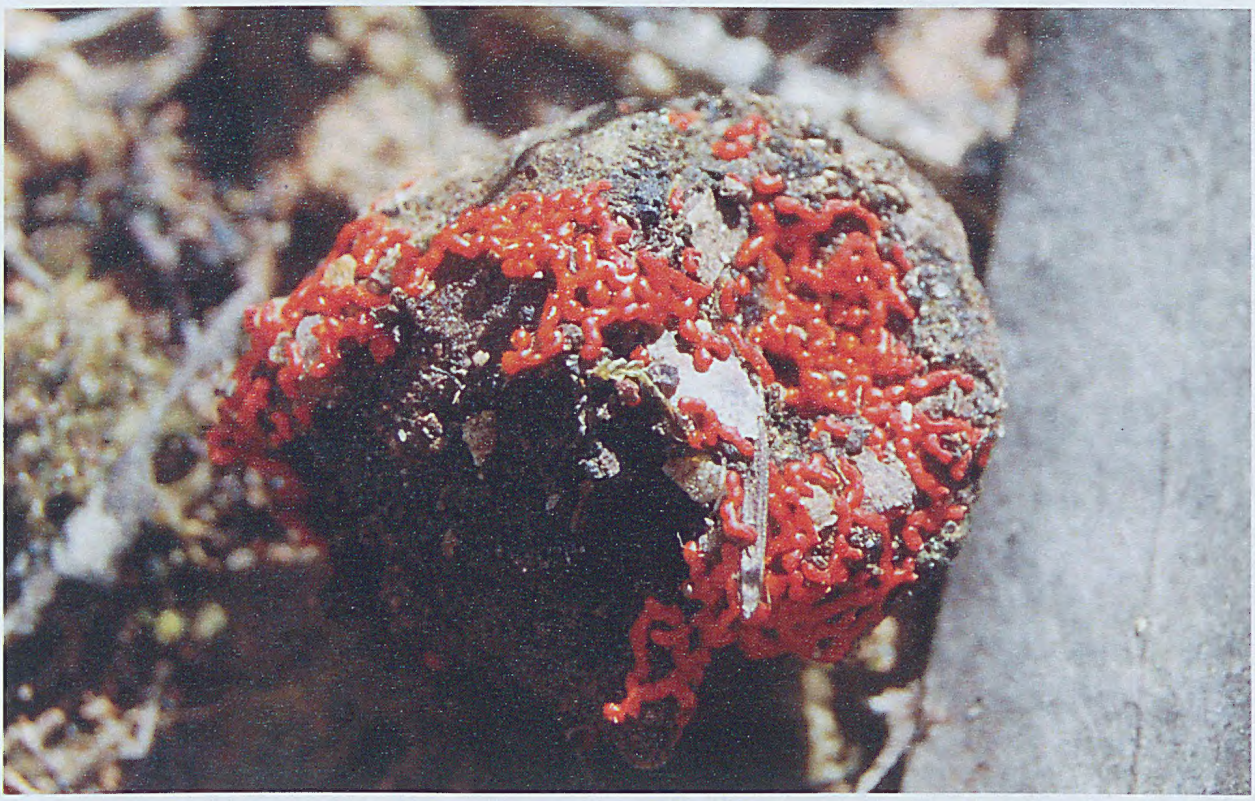
Planned Bendigo Family Nature Club

The Bendigo Sustainability Group, BDEC and BFNC will combine their approach to this. Initial ideas/plans include Leaf Litter Jungle, Mud dwellers, Plants - alive or dead?
Feb 16 Launch Crusoe Res. All activities will be held on 3rd Sunday of the month. Contact Jan Orr for more details.

Please note: There is no general meeting in January. The next general meeting will be on February 9, 2011.

More images from the 'other' kingdoms by Joy Clusker

The slime moulds are getting more spectacular, aren't they?. This one grew/settled/dwelt/resided on kangaroo dung and was seen on the Great Dividing Trail, September 2010.



Phellinus wahlbergi (black and tan conk) seen on a stump at Epsom. This is an attractive fungus, but it could easily be a satellite image of a mountain range, or a micrograph of a cell membrane…

More orchids….the similarities in colour range is striking (incl. the Duck orchid on the front cover)

Calochilus robertsonii (Purplish Beard Orchid), taken on the GDT by Joy Clusker

←

Pterostylis maxima (Rusty Hood), seen at Black Rock during November excursion

↓ Photographer: Matt Comer

Caladenia tentaculata, Green Comb Spider Orchid ↓

This photo, taken on the Great Dividing Trail excursion, shows the 'workings' of this orchid very clearly. The knobbly, purple steps lead the potential pollinator into the start of the 'cage' (once the labellum has flipped up), from which there is only an upward escape, via the sticky pollinium on the column.

Photographer: Joy Clusker

Unusual plants.... Photographed by Rod Orr

Missed the 'Thing of the Night' at the November meeting? On the right is the Orobanche (*O. minor*), that Rod brought in, and above is the Dookie Daisy (*Brachyscome gracilis*) from the Northern Wellsford Forest, a 'rare and vulnerable' plant in Victoria.

Pterostylis plumosa
(Bearded Greenhood)
Photographer: Joy Clusker

The Golden Pennants, *Glischrocaryon behrii* are already developing their Autumn colours in many areas of the Kamarooka forest

The purple page… Photographer: Rod Orr

These beautiful Finger-flowers, *Cheiranthera cyanea,* have been flowering for several weeks now - getting close to the end of their flowering season, but they are still spectacular.

Photographed in Wildflower Drive

Solanum simile (Ondoroo)
This is the locally rare *Solanum* that was also shown during the November 'Thing of the Night' ←

Rod *et al.* went searching for orchids recently without success, however, they did find some wonderful specimens of grassland plants, for example, this lovely lily, *Caesia calliantha.* →

October Notes and Observations

Matthew Comer
9 Budgies flew over the Mandurang Nursery while Matt was hard at work.
Nest containing young was disturbed, when a tip truck, depositing its load, shifted the branch and nest. Luckily, the parent bird returned immediately after the truck left.

Pam & John Land
Pam and John have noticed this year, as with past years, that many small birds, like Jacky Winter, Willy Wagtail, Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, Yellow Robin etc., have made nests and laid eggs. Nestlings have sometimes been produced, but eggs and nestlings are being predated and the birds have failed to raise young. There are Grey Currawongs, Grey Butcherbirds, Kookaburras, Goannas etc. about. Because the understorey is so depleted the nests are very open and thus easy for these predators to spot.

Ian Magee
Ian witnessed a recent election promise for the removal of pest & weed species in State Forests - a pork barrelling promise of $millions if the candidate's party gained support at the State election. We received this news with considerable skepticism, gained from our past experience with approaches to pest and weed problems.
100 participants attended the conservation meeting at Daylesford - VEAC process requested to continue for the necessary evaluation of applications to protect small reserves properly.
Stuart is being photographed tomorrow morning - members were invited to join in this photo opportunity.
N Bgo Landcare - At the next meeting, Garry Cheers will speak to the group on Mammal Identification (in Leans Rd).

Bev Culvenor
Silvereyes are constant visitors to Bev's yard. A nest was found on the ground - probably a Silvereye's nest. Eggshell pieces were also found beneath a tree - possibly Yellow Thornbill.
A Silvereye with a bright yellow patch on its head visited for 3 years (2006 - 2008); it didn't come in 2009 but, this year, one with a bright yellow patch on its head arrived but it is probably a different bird because the yellow patch is a different shape - long and narrow. Is this bird an offspring of the original visitor?

Peter Ellis
Peter recently visited Mt Pilot National Park. At the foot of this mountain is the Yeddonba Aboriginal Heritage Site and in there is a rock painting, which is thought to depict a Thylacine. Thylacines disappeared from the mainland around 2,000 years ago, so that places the painting at least as old. Unfortunately trees that shaded the rock painting were cut down and with direct sun now beating down on the site, the painting has faded considerably, in fact, it is difficult to make much of the outline. A display board has a replica of the painting; it is in red, presumably ochre, and the tiger stripes are quite recognisable.

On the last Tuesday of September, I presented a talk on the history and the activities of the BFNC over Phoenix Radio, and it seemed to go very well. Darren had some recordings of frog and birds for several of the interludes. My recording of Bird Calls of Australia by Redvers Eddy and Frank Cusack would have been handy, but my original copy disappeared after a loan some years ago. However I have it on cassette and have been recently given a clean original vinyl recording and hope to have this transferred to CD for future use.

Matt and I had a trip out into the Whipstick on Bendigo Cup Day, hoping to locate the rare stand of Red Correa in flower, which is usually out in October/November, in contrast to the regular green form that is co-existent on the site. Found several regenerating plants, but none in flower to be certain of the colour, or for photographs. We did see some amazing wildflower displays, particularly of *Dampiera* and found one sky blue form. I took the opportunity to show Matt the location of the fenced area (private property) of Peach Heath. We also walked in to a little known location

of *Westringia crassifolia* by a dam in the central mallee section of the National Park, it was nicely in flower and Matt was not aware of this location. The plants, as with other locations, were fenced for protection.

On the late afternoon just before the meeting, I took Matt up the back road (Edwards Rd.) to One Tree and showed him the location, where two plants of Pine Heath, *Astroloma pinifolia* used to exist, hoping to find some regeneration – next year might be a better time. However, we did flush out a cute little quail that scurried off through the undergrowth. The bluebells were spectacular. Further down the road on the way home, I showed him the location of the large pink flowered form of Bendigo Waxflower. It is in propagation at Marilyn Sprague's, and known as the 'Edwards Rd.' form. I found that patch of plants, when I was about 16. We also had a quick look at one plant of long leafed waxflower, that I found in the nearby power line clearing.

October General Meeting: Speaker Neil McFarlane - Mallee Fowl Conservation Project

Neil is a Kooloonong Mallee farmer, in an area that has experienced a long history of drought and dust storms – his neighbouring properties always had malleefowl. In 1967, a Field Naturalists Group was founded in the local area, and malleefowl recovery became one of the focal points.

Originally, malleefowl distribution covered most of the (current) wheat belt of Aust (down as far as Geelong/Brisbane Ranges), but the species did not occur on the Nullarbor or in the far North of Australia. Today, malleefowl have a very restricted distribution as most of their prime habitat has been cleared for other uses – and the remainder is fragmented; Besides habitat loss, there have been many other threats over the years: predators, competition, speeding vehicles with subsequent road deaths, and they were also once commonly hunted for food. In spite of current ecological knowledge, there are few corridors between existing reserves to enable dispersal, so the loss of local genetic diversity is also of concern.

The International Conference on Megapode Conservation in 1997 emphasised that long term monitoring is required to determine overall health and survival. As a result, the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group (VMRG) became incorporated and gained funding from various sources – and is now able to fund research into malleefowl matters. Regular contact ensures essential updating for researchers. Initially, people working with Malleefowl required extensive compass skills, but now GPS technology has modernised this aspect (although basic compass skills are still required for safety of researchers). Mounds are all mapped with grid numbers and are now more easily found - other unknown mounds are also discovered by walking new paths. However, in such remote country, mapping and monitoring is not done in dangerous conditions.

Neil could once see malleefowl on back roads all the time – there was much uncleared mallee then - but farming in the area changed to extensive grain cropping which led to widespread clearing and removal of essential habitat. Now much of the area produces almonds and olives with little or no understorey. Wandown (between Managatan and the Murray) provides the best malleefowl breeding conditions, even though it has been disturbed several times in the past. Although surrounded by cropping land, the birds are still able to survive in the poorer quality mallee remnants (which act like islands in the cropped landscape). It is interesting, that in such 'harsh' conditions, evolution has made aftercare for chicks non-existent and non-essential; babies hatch fully feathered and can fly when very young.

Monitoring, a major part of the VMRG activities, detects eggs, eggshells, feathers, and scats near mounds. The latter tell

whether the mounds are currently used or not and DNA records are kept routinely now from these remains. Active mounds are monitored daily and dug out by hand to avoid disturbing unhatched eggs - eggs are removed for incubation at 31-33 degrees.

This is all difficult work but it was impossible to catch and trap adult birds – in some cases several birds may have been using the same mound (eggs laid too often for a single mature female) – such hypotheses may be supported by DNA and other direct observations – but so far any discoveries have not solved this puzzle.
Last year, around 50 volunteers monitored 1164 separate mounds. In 2002 there were 900, but few were active mounds.

At Wandown, there were >30 mounds active last year. Activity depends much on weather conditions, especially the timing of rainfall. Sufficient moisture is needed for composting and heat generation, with the nest temperature needing to be regulated to within a couple of degrees. Adaptive management of mounds to cater for storms is also necessary. Malleefowl start breeding after 3 years and can breed for 10 years, producing about 10 eggs/year. The rate of natural attrition is about 80%, but still the population may be maintained under those odds.
Sugar lerp production enables rapid growth of birds, and the actual dependence on this food source needs to be tested. It certainly was a very important food source for aborigines.

A pair of birds defend the nest territory – but the female wanders during the day, while the male is working the mound. During their wanderings, females may mate with other males. Radio tracking has been considered but it has been found hard to attach the radio collars; malleefowl also fly long distances and can easily fly out of range.

The DNA from separated malleefowl populations is very similar - presumably living birds radiated from a small surviving population after the last Ice Age. In the 1970s, a number of malleefowls were released in Whipstick but they didn't survive, may be due to dogs or foxes.

Malleefowl are active in surrounding farmland during the day. Foxes may be a threat in restricted habitat areas. Monitors collect scats as part of their research. Interestingly, fox scat analysis reveals bones often of rare marsupials (thought to be absent/extinct).
Many questions followed this very interesting talk.

This article was written up from notes made by Rod, so any mistakes are due to my misinterpretation (ed.)

P.S. The Malleefowl Recovery Group has an interesting website for people who would like more information about the project and the bird:
http://www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au/
Clicking the 'Early Literature' button, I found an interesting story from a book entitled 'Legends of the birds'. Below is the start of the story…

Why mallee bird lays her eggs in the sand…
WAYAMBEH, a descendant of the original Wayambeh, who was turned into a tortoise, married Kookaburra. It was a strange mating, with an even stranger consequence.
Tortoises lay their eggs in the sand close to streams and billabongs, leaving them to hatch out for themselves, whereas kookaburras are like all sensible birds: they build nests and keep the eggs warm with their own bodies.
Kookaburra, argued with his tortoise wife.
"It's not right," he protested. "Whoever heard of anyone burying eggs in the sand, just as if they were rubbish to be disposed of? Don't be so silly, Wayambeh. Do the sensible thing. I'll help you build a nest and then you can do your duty as a mother in the proper way."
Tortoise darted her head from side to side in exasperation. "I don't know why I ever married you, you silly bird. A fine figure I would make climbing a tree!" "If my mother could lay her eggs in a nest, surely it's good enough for you?"

What does this have to do with malleefowl? See above website (under 'early literature') for the conclusion of the tale.

Diary

The General, Bird Observers Group and Fauna Study Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

Wednesday, December 8 6.00-6.30pm
In December, we have an earlier starting time and begin the meeting with a meal. Bring something to share, your own utensils and your Christmas spirit! After dinner, Rod will tell us something about the Canning Stock Route plants that he encountered on a recent trip.

Fauna Group
This group normally meets (in the clubrooms) on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm. New and seasoned Club members are most welcome to attend.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.
W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

The next Garden Working Bee will take place on **Saturday December 4, at 9 am**

We are reverting back to the 'old' working bee time because the weather is warming up.

Amongst the Billy Buttons…
Anne Bridley and Kerrie Norris are intently searching the ground for interesting plants. They are amongst the golden billy buttons (*Pycnosorus chrysanthes*) in the Kamarooka Forest during the Club's November excursion (Photographer: Matt Comer).